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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION BY LIFE CHANCES: EVIDENCE FROM RUSSIA⁵

The present paper operationalizes one of the oldest concepts in the sociological literature about social stratification. Relying on Weber's theory, the authors consider life chances in terms of positive and negative privileges. This framework is fertile ground for constructing a series of indices measuring opportunities and risks in key areas of life such as economic conditions, work situation, human capital accumulation, and consumption and leisure activities. Drawing on empirical data from three 2015 representative Russian surveys, the authors classified the Russian population on a continuum of life chances. The majority of Russians obtain just one third of the maximum scores on the life-chance scale. It is also shown that the life-chance scale has a strong correlation with the peaks of income distribution; however, the relationship between lower- and middle-income groups are not that salient. Finally, we show that life chances are uniquely distributed across different localities in contemporary Russia. We admit therefore the high analytical power of the neo-Weberian concept of life chances in stratification studies. Measured via a multidimensional index, life chances appear a good alternative to a gradational approach and the relational stratification schema developed particularly for the working population.

Keywords: life chances, social risks, positive and negative privileges, social structure and stratification, inequality, Russia

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Introduction

The social structure of a society may be examined from different perspectives. The diversity of approaches depends on authors' ambitions to identify classes. Students of class analysis typically develop their theory within either relational or gradational conceptions of class (see: Ossowski, [1958] 1963; Wright, 2005: 180-192). Attempts of the relational approach to analyze class focus on employment relationships and the market situation (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992); industrial relations and exploitation (Wright, 1989); or the 'relationship of people to income-generating resources or assets of various sorts' (Wright, 2005: 185). Most adherents of the relational class analysis focus on the causal mechanisms that determine the life chances of people. From this point of view, "class" and "life chances" are seen as separate phenomena, although life chances play a central role in class analysis. This, we believe, narrows the original – in fact, Weberian – theory of life chances. This paper reassesses the theory of life chances; that is, it considers life chances from the perspective of their stratification role, rather than as an outcome of class.

Relational discourse thus imposes too strong a framework on life chances. A researcher interested in a description first would prefer the gradational conception of class, which identifies class through material inequalities and/or occupation-specific closures. This approach ranks population on a ladder – either a continuous or a discreet hierarchy of social groups and individuals. Although the gradational approach to class analysis is more flexible (as it does not imply causality), it still developed under strict assumptions concerning class theory. The methodological specificity of class analysis pushes researchers to start with the *ex-ante* postulation that social class is a reality *per se* so that a researcher will tend to find an efficient and valid instrument appropriate for class identification in a particular society and related data. However, there are cases – and Russia provides a good example – when such assumptions are invalid and traditional implementations of class analysis seem ambiguous and misleading (Kordonsky, 2016; Shkaratan & Yastrebov, 2016). In light of this, a stratification study on Russia (or similar societies) needs a flexible analytical instrument that does not impose strict assumptions on the existence of classes but – at the same time – provides opportunities for their identification.

In other words, our instrument should first solve the task of *social differentiation* (Kaare, 1965) rather than stratification; thus, a complex (or classless) approach to social stratification is called for (Pakulski, 2005). This approach describes either people's location in income inequalities (single-dimensional scales, see Anikin et al., 2016) or their complex socio-economic and demographic background (multidimensional scales). The most popular example of the multidimensional approach relates to the socioeconomic-status (SES) approach. In line with the neo-Weberian tradition, SES adherents consider it a combination of income, occupational prestige, and educational attainments. For its universality, SES is widely used in socio-economic, psychological and epidemiological studies. It has a hierarchical structure so that SES logic is very close to the gradational approach. Researchers use SES when they want to account for the social and economic background of respondents, however, they tend to

avoid discourse on class. There are also other multi-dimensional versions of the classless approach to the categorization of a population, such as quality of life (QoL), or standard of living studies, also influenced by the neo-Weberian tradition. To maintain a hierarchical structure of the classification instrument, most such studies apply index-building strategies.

These strategies are very useful since they operationalize different components reflecting various aspects of life chances. Although the notion of life chances has long been established in the literature, scholars have yet to arrive at a conventional operationalization of this term. Moreover, there have been no attempts made so far to apply it to Russian empirical data. This research fills these gaps by 1) reviewing the theoretical and methodological approaches to life chances, 2) proposing an operationalization of this concept for constructing a stratification scheme, and 3) describing a stratification profile of Russian society from the perspective of life chances. For the empirical analysis, we use three datasets: the HSE Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (2015), the Monitoring Study of the Institute of Sociology RAS (2015), and the HSE Institute for Social Policy (the HSE ISP) (2017).

1. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Life Chances

The concept of life chances (*Lebenschancen*) was introduced into the sociological discourse by Weber, in particular in his essay “Distribution of Power: Class, Status, Party” (Weber, [1968] 1978) in which class is defined as a group of people characterized by a similar specific set of life chances that are both the cause and the consequence of their status. To define class, Weber introduced the notion of “class situation” seen as a “typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions, and personal life experiences” (Weber, 1994: 114). This chance, according to Weber, is determined by the amount and the nature of power (or its deficit) required to transform available resources and accumulated skills and competencies into income under the existing economic order.

In other words, individuals or groups that find themselves in the same class situation have similar life chances, or a “shared typical probability of procuring goods, gaining a position in life, and finding inner satisfaction” (Weber, [1968] 1978: 302). If the similarity of life chances points to something common among individuals that are in a “homogeneous” (Daston, 2008) class situation, the allocation of life chances, then, is determined by the market, in accordance with the individuals’ available assets. Thus, the market becomes the source of life-chance inequality, and the tangible assets which generate income are considered by the market to be the main resources, which was typical for the age of early industrial societies when Weber himself lived. (Grusky, 2001). That is why Weber sees property used for generating returns as the key asset for social stratification based on life chances. Types of this property may vary, but its yield potential on the market remains essential. Individuals and groups that live from property income are referred to as the “property class”.

When individuals do not possess any property or do not use its various types to receive income, stratification is provided by income opportunities from specific skills sold on the market. Those skills are

acquired through education in the workplace and professional training, or, in other words, by means of accumulating and developing a specific component of human capital to the extent that it allows managing and increasing economic capital. For such individuals, education is a crucial factor defining their position in what Weber calls the “acquisition” class. This group is not socially homogeneous and includes workers of three categories – skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled.

Recognizing the variety of assets which can generate income, Weber used it to single out different classes characterized by specific life chances, including chances for goods consumption, production, status opportunities, and reaching “inner satisfaction”. The methodological core of Weber’s life chances theory, which allows the determination of an individual’s class and a prediction of relevant social actions, is life-chance differentiation in terms of **positive** and **negative privileges** in class situations. Belonging to the opposite sides of the “privilege scale” is determined by the distribution of power in consumption and production.

Positively privileged class members become the agents of power and domination (Wright, 1997). The indicators of a positively privileged position among various classes, according to Weber, include the following opportunities: (Weber, [1968] 1978: 303): a) monopolizing the acquisition of high-priced consumers goods; b) monopolizing capital formation from savings, i.e., of the utilization of wealth in the form of loan capital; c) being able to control executive positions in business; d) monopolizing the privileges of socially advantageous and costly kinds of education. The reasons for positive privileges in life chances, are according to Weber, owning certain means of production or having a professional education (the intellectual class with no property such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, entrepreneurs, and civil servants). Weber pointed out that both these groups, which had professional education, rare among his contemporaries, were characterized by positive privileges in life chances. Close to them were the lower middle classes, including those self-employed or owning the means of production with a minimum number of subordinates.

Negative privileges, on the contrary, are related to a lack of property or sought-after skills, but also – and to a greater extent – to atypical financial hardships, poverty, and debts which make an individual dependent, subject to domination or even possession. According to Weber, negatively privileged groups mostly included workers who can only sell their capacity for labor and have low status in the occupational hierarchy.

In addition to the opposite ends of the privilege scale, Weber talked about an intermediate position held, for instance, by farmers and craftsmen, lower and mid-level civil officers, and clerks employed both in business and government institutions, and the majority of arts professionals.

Eventually, Weber’s life chances theory gained international acclaim and was further developed, although the theory’s advancement and the interpretation of life chances varied considerably among different authors. For instance, Breen (2005) suggests viewing inequality in the distribution of life chances through the lens of the possession of market-relevant assets. Giddens sees life chances as “the

chances an individual has for sharing in the socially created economic or cultural ‘goods’ that typically exist in any given society” (Giddens, 1973: 130-131). Eitzen and Zinn (1989) point out that life chances characterize the chances of living a quality life and having positive experiences throughout life.

In the economic field, the development of neo-Weberian views and their application in the analysis of developed industrial societies distinguish three relatively independent domains in life chances studies⁶: 1) “economic security” (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992) which has to do with property and financial resources, 2) industrial relations, or opportunities in the field of work and employment, and 3) consumption (including leisure activities) related to the standards and quality of living.

The operationalization of economic security basically describes and specifies the signs suggested by Weber for economic class. The signs of positively privileged groups in terms of economic security include: a) valuable real estate property (in addition to the main residential property) which, when needed, can be used as an income source (by renting it out or selling it) and b) bank deposits, savings, loans, and various investments that would sustain life for a significant period of time in the event of losing regular sources of income. The signs of negatively privileged groups usually include: a) numerous or significant debts and non-flexible expenses that increase the risk of impoverishment (Van Kempen, 1994), and b) an increasingly unstable main income due to the lack of permanent employment and salary control (Standing, 2011).

Life-chance indicators in terms of industrial relations were fundamentally developed both by neo-Weberian (Goldthorpe, Llewellyn, and Payne (1987), Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992)) and neo-Marxist scholars (Wright (1989), Scott (2002), Dahrendorf (1979)). Weber’s idea of the value of services rendered is complemented by the Marxist notion of alienated labor (Marx, 1859). Positive privileges in terms of industrial relations include a total absence of alienated labor, and reduced alienation implying control over one’s own labor (autonomy) and the possibility to influence the decision making process (authority) (Wright, 1989; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992). Another important sign of positive privilege in industrial relations is being provided with jobs by society (Dahrendorf, 1979), and especially permanent jobs (Mazziotta & Pareto, 2017) which are becoming increasingly rare amid spreading non-standard forms of employment and precarization (particularly, a job that would satisfy workers’ professional and career needs) (Standing, 2011). Another sign of positive privileges in industrial relations are the additional benefits provided at working places within the framework of the employment relationships (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992), as the contract type can considerably affect a person’s life opportunities in terms of social security and current income.

⁶ Although neo-Weberian scholars did not adhere to M. Weber’s terminology on positive and negative privilege, the idea of polarity is still reflected in their works through the opposition of life chances and risks. However, when considering life chances as a causal component of the social structure, the notion of “risks” used instead of “negative privilege” proves to be less effective due to uncertainty and specific risks typical for different social groups.

The main elements of negative privilege in industrial relations typically comprise long-term unemployment risks (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007), legal violations in the workplace (or the abuse of employee rights (Dahrendorf, 1979)), the unfavorable employment conditions (Beck, 2009) associated with higher rates of exploitation and low wages, which is particularly relevant for contemporary Russia (Anikin & Tikhonova, 2016), or a dangerous and harmful work environment.

However, most contemporary neo-Weberianists consider life chances in consumption and leisure activities to be key, which is not surprising given the development of a consumerist society in the late industrial period. A positively privileged position in consumption implies an experience of economic well-being (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992) and prospects of long-term economic well-being, including old age (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992), which reflects the dynamic aspect of this problem, and available opportunities for expanded style and goods consumption (Tumin, 1973) related to the accumulation and use of provided goods and services (Dahrendorf, 1979), and particularly comfortable living conditions (Popova & Pishniak, 2016). Similarly, negative privilege in consumption implies food deprivation (Alkire & Foster, 2011; Davydova, 2003), a lower standard of durable goods consumption compared to the majority of the population, and a lower standard of living conditions (Tikhonova, 2014).

As the individual's role in the economy grows and the late industrial era gives way to the post-industrial, the intangible assets of workers also become more important, and, as a result, leisure activities are now considered one of the crucial elements in developing cultural and social capital, as well as certain personal traits required for productive work. Modern society begins to view leisure as a goal in itself, which has prompted modern sociology scholars to apply a notion describing a new social type – *homo ludens* (the “traveler” or the “player”, see Bauman, 1994). On the other hand, growing competition in the labor market among ‘generic’ – or an interchangeable and disposable – workforce (Castells, 2000) is turning leisure opportunities (especially a proper vacation) into a scarce resource. That is why the availability of good leisure opportunities (and first of all, a paid vacation spent abroad) has become a measure of quality of life and, consequently, of positive privilege. As Western societies transition to a service economy, life chances associated with nontangible assets are becoming more important in terms of stratification, and overall life chances not related to material consumption are growing more diverse.

Due to the increased importance of human potential in the economy, not only access to quality education or healthcare is being taken into account when evaluating key life chances, but also limitations stemming from weak health (when assessing negative privilege) (Deaton, [2013] 2015). Positive privilege in this field is related, therefore, to the availability of high-quality medical and recreational treatment. When it comes to negative privilege, it is not illness that matters, as it can be compensated for one way or another. An illness-caused inability to sustain a way of life typical for a social group and a lack of access to the required medical assistance are likely to be more significant indicators.

The interpretation of life chances in terms of education and health has significantly changed in the past decades. As the role of continuing education is growing and the significance of investments in education at the very early stages of human development is being increasingly emphasized (Cunha, Heckman, & Schennach, 2010; Heckman, 2000, 2006), participation in various forms of professional training has come to the fore, including, first of all, the development of digital skills, possibilities to invest in one's children's education, and access to necessary fee-based education which reveal, in Weber's terms, the opportunities for monopolizing socially advantageous education. Since tertiary education has become common in Russia (OECD, 2016), the availability of any higher education is not as significant for stratification as it was forty or fifty years ago. Of much more importance is access to the highest quality education, which typically involves additional financial expenses.

Empirical studies focusing on QoL have made considerable contributions to the operationalization of life chances. This widely used concept employs a multidimensional measurement of a number of socio-economic and demographic indicators, such as material living conditions, employment, health, education, leisure and social interactions, economic and physical safety, governance and basic rights, natural and living environment, and overall experience of life⁷. The indicators developed under this concept are useful for survey-based studies (Alkire & Foster, 2011; Noll, 2011; Popova & Pishniak, 2016; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010; Tikhonova, 2014).

2. The Method of Constructing Russian Social Stratification Model Based on Life Chances

As shown above, the Weberian concept of life chances and its further development as part of the neo-Weberian tradition allows for a rather broad interpretation of the very notion of "life chances" and in the attempts to operationalize it. This leads to a number of complicated **theoretical** and **practical** questions when operationalizing life chances on the basis of empirical data from surveys and constructing a relevant Russian social stratification model.

The first question is whether to consider only the availability of opportunities additional to the norm, as some of the researchers do (Dahrendorf, 1979; Popova & Pishniak, 2016), or to follow the path of other scholars (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992) and Weber himself and base the analysis on the notions of positive and negative privilege. The method applied in this study considers life chances through the lens of positive and negatives privileges, based on the assumption that the deprivations and risks which individuals and groups are subject to are no less important for understanding their social position than their advantages. This means operationalizing the deviation of life opportunities from a certain current standard in Russian society. Therefore, this standard needs to be defined first (which was done during eventual scale development).

⁷ This particular measurement of QoL is applied by Eurostat: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Quality_of_life_indicators (Access checked on 4.12.2017).

The second theoretical and methodological question is whether to be guided by the traditional Weberian and neo-Weberian notion of individual class characteristics based on their assets when assessing their life chances. For a number of reasons, individual class characteristics are not taken into consideration in this study. First of all, focusing on income assets automatically excludes those groups of the population that do not receive income from property or employment (including those who are supported only by money transfers and, in particular, retirees). Secondly, there is still no consensus on the question of whether Russian society is a class society and which characteristics are crucial for an individual's life chances and social status. Thus, the task was to establish deviations in life opportunities from a certain standard in modern Russian society.

Finally, the third problem that needs to be solved in developing the methods for life-chance operationalization is determining which domains of life opportunities should be selected (or, in other terms, which domains of life chances are crucial for determining individual positions in the stratification hierarchy). The state of a society at a certain stage of development and determine what its members view as truly valuable or a sign of well-being needs to be taken into account. Solving this problem was partially eased by the high degree of value homogeneity in Russian society and a general consensus on the criteria for social status and life goals. (Gorshkov & Tikhonova, 2016; Gorshkov & Petukhov, 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 2017). For this reason, the study focused on areas of life viewed by the majority of Russians as most significant when operationalizing the signs of positive and negative privileges. These are as follows: economic conditions, work situation, opportunities for acquiring human capital, consumption and leisure activities.

Three datasets were chosen for the empirical calculations. One of them is the dataset from Wave 24 (late 2015, n=10,209) of the Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey by the Higher School of Economics (RLMS-HSE) which is widely used both in Russia and abroad. The second is the dataset from the Monitoring Survey by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (October 2015, n=4,000). The third dataset is from the Institute for Social Policy of the Higher School of Economics (the HSE ISP) (January 2017, n=5,087). According to the teams behind the surveys, all three datasets represent the adult population in Russia in terms of gender, age, and location, but each survey had its own particular sampling, which allowed a range of variations for the model itself to be defined.

Notably, we used indicators reflecting both the individual and household levels (for instance, the type of housing where a family lives). Some indicators were developed only for certain groups not the entire population; in this case, we calculated them for those groups only (for instance, indicators related to underage children were calculated for parents of such children; indicators related to work were calculated for the employed population⁸).

⁸ To prevent these additional calculations from affecting the integral scale indicators, separate stratification models for life chances of those groups were built on the basis of all three datasets. The models showed that the effect was insignificant and did not change the general model as the signs of positive and negative privileges in those groups were distributed practically in the same way.

Based on these premises, the scales of positive and negative privilege were developed for each dataset. Each scale included four subscales calculated on the basis of three positive/negative privilege components (Table 1). Thus, the scales of positive and negative privilege included 12 components each.

Table 1 – Subscales and Indicators Used in Constructing the Life Chances Stratification Model of the Russian Society

Positive Privilege Scale	Negative Privilege Scale
<i>Subscale “Economic Conditions”</i>	
a second residential property available year-round	numerous or considerable debts, including mortgage
residential property, in addition to the main housing, and a car (simultaneous owning)	considerable non-flexible current expenses (rent, etc.)
significant investments and savings	unstable income (temporary or one-time jobs, lack of permanent job)
<i>Subscale “Work Situation”</i>	
minimized effect of alienated labor (control over one’s own work and influence on decision making)	long-term unemployment risks (being unemployed for more than 3 months in a row, etc.)
a job viewed as desirable by the majority of Russians (interesting, high-profile, etc.)	law violations at work (lack of formal employment, numerous labor rights violations, etc.)
additional social benefits provided by the employer (fringe benefits, etc.)	unfavorable work conditions (unpaid overtime, wage delays, etc.)
<i>Subscale “Opportunities for Maintaining and Accumulating Human Capital”</i>	
availability of socially attractive education resources (fee-based education for adults and children)	lack of access to necessary education (individuals’ assessment of education chances as small; the actual education level is lower than average)
availability of necessary healthcare (access to paid medical and recreational services)	likeliness of significant health deterioration due to the lack of necessary healthcare and/or a hazardous job
digital skills (multi-purpose and regular Internet use)	lack of access to information technologies in everyday life (no means of access to IT or lack of IT skills)

<i>Subscale “Consumption and Leisure Activities”</i>	
access to expanded life style and goods consumption (number of durable goods in the household more than 1.25 times the national median)	a narrower standard of goods consumption (number of durable goods in the household less than 0.75 times the national median)
particularly comfortable housing conditions (spacious housing: over 36 meters per person plus 18 sq. m per every next person, with available amenities)	poor housing conditions (lack of amenities, total area of less than 12 sq. m per person, several households in the same house)
good vacation opportunities (vacation abroad at least once a year, ability to buy package tours, going on trips, etc.)	food deprivations (individuals describing their diets as “bad” and “very bad”; saving on types of food crucial for health)

The components of these scales were specified through a number of indicators, however, just some of them are similarly measured in the datasets of interest. Each indicator was in the range of 0 to 1 points, and the presence of at least one indicator meant that the scale component had the value of “1”. That was the maximum value for all components⁹ showing that an individual had scores of positive or negative privilege in the given area. Thus, the method did not specify the scale of an individual’s risks or opportunities, but only pointed to the presence or lack of deviations from the standard. In this respect, the method was very flexible, with even cases close to the norm viewed as the signs of positive and negative privilege. Scores of positive and negative privilege were marked with “+” and “-” respectively. This allowed us to construct the indices of both positive and negative privilege (Fig. 1 and 2); the combination of both resulted in an integral index of social stratification in Russia (Fig. 3).

It goes without saying that the indicators and subscales applied in this method and reflecting life opportunities and social risks do not represent the whole variety of structural features indicating an individual’s position in the stratification system. However, this study was limited by datasets. Nevertheless, despite incomplete empirical data, the results are of significant interest. For positive privileges, life opportunities for the majority of Russians are very close to the standard; scores of positive privileges are found only in a few areas of their lives, and the size of the group with numerous positive privileges is very small, tending to zero. For example, 48.1–62.4% of Russians in different datasets have no more than 2 scores out of 12 possible, and at least every ninth person has no scores at all (neither positive, nor negative ones), while Russians from the upper decile have no more that 5 or 6 scores overall. Only 1.7% of respondents in the RLMS-HSE dataset had 7 points or more (and only 10.7% of respondents had 5 or more points¹⁰). In the IS RAS dataset, the respective proportion of respondents was

⁹ These components were given no weight, as they described life chances for satisfying basic needs in any modern society, and all measured life opportunities could be viewed as equivalent in this respect.

¹⁰ That is, positioned in the two upper thirds of the scale.

3.6% (13.5% with 5 or more points). In the HSE ISP dataset which was slightly skewed upward, the proportion of respondents in the upper half of the scale was 5.4% (and 17.7% of respondents had 5 or more points).

Despite the slight disparities in estimates, we see that the integral opportunities of Russians are remarkably limited. Returning to Wright’s formula ‘what you have determines what you get’ (Wright, 2005: 186), Russians merely got scarcity from the economic prosperity of the recent years. Figure 1 provides fertile ground for reassessing the recent optimistic findings about Russia as a middle-class society, as only few Russians have outstanding opportunities in one of the considered domains of life. It seems that even high incomes do not necessarily lead to positive privilege (see further discussion in the next section).

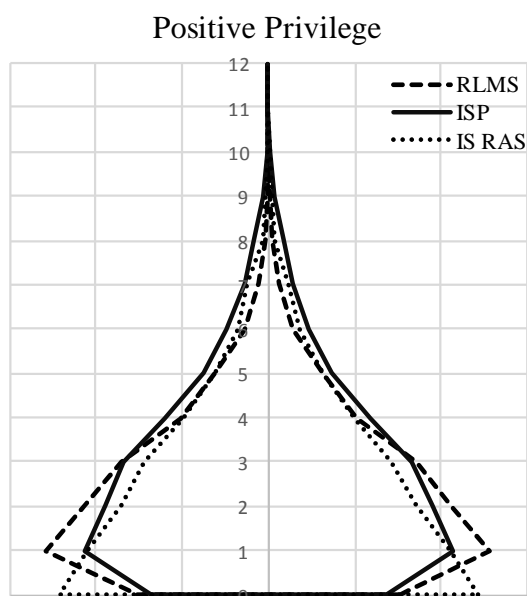


Fig. 1 – Distribution of 12 components indicating *positive privilege* among Russians

The number of Russians with no signs of negative privilege is small (from 10.1–23.3%, depending on the dataset). At the same time, multiple signs of negative privilege are even rarer than for positive privilege: in all of the datasets, less than 2% of Russians have 7 or more points on this scale (4.9% to 11.5% have 5 or more points). The majority of the population has just 1 or 2 points on the negative privilege scale (49.2% in the RLMS dataset, 46.5% in the HSE ISP dataset, and 44.5% in the IS RAS dataset). Thus, negative privilege is common among Russians, but is not pervasive, being found only in a certain few areas of life. This means that the averaging out is even more prominent for negative privilege compared to positive (Fig. 2).

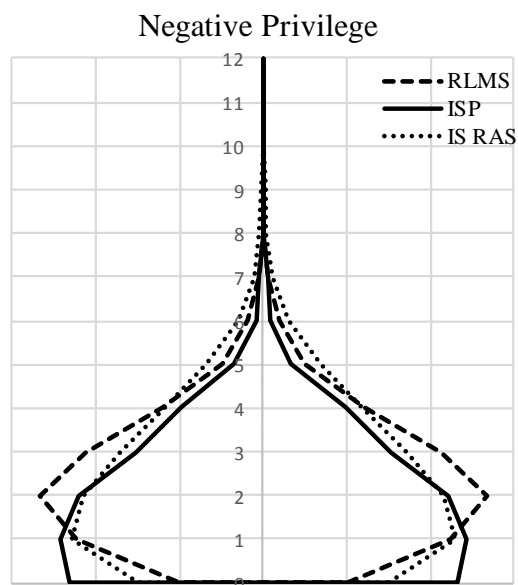


Fig. 2 – Distribution of 12 components indicating negative privilege among Russians

The integral model of social stratification in Russia based on life chances (Fig. 3) demonstrates even more clearly that respondents are concentrated around the neutral zone (35.6–42.0% are in the range of -1 to $+1$ in different datasets, and 56.4–66.1% of the adult population are in the range of -2 to $+2$ ¹¹). Thus, the applied method seems to capture a certain societal norm, a living standard characteristic of contemporary Russian society. In addition, it allows us to compare the number of those who are positioned higher and lower than this standard, and to conclude that only a small proportion of the population in Russia is characterized by a broader living standard (positive privileges in most areas of life); however, the percentage of those subject to multiple deprivations and risks is even smaller.

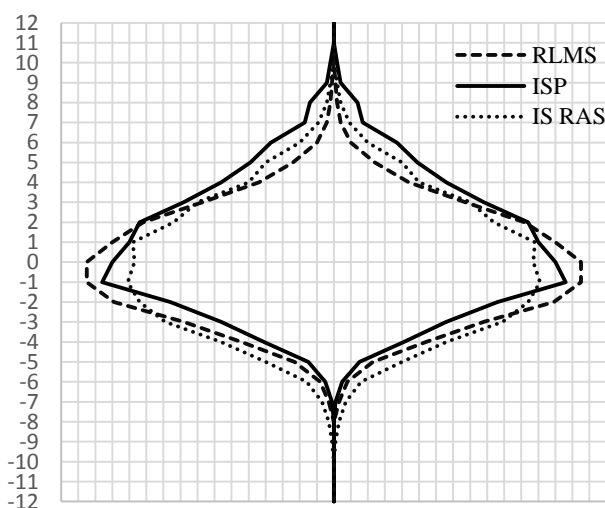


Figure 3 – Social stratification based on life chances in the Russian society, combination of positive and negative privilege scores

¹¹ Taking into account the “relaxed” nature of the applied method, when just one indicator with a non-zero value was enough for the entire component to be assigned a positive value, as well as the fact that the majority of the population across all datasets is located in this range, the social norm borders or the typical life standard should be represented by -2 to $+2$ range.

However, this overall favorable picture may hide the diversity of life situations brought about by different factors. Further, two key factors of income and location will be described.

3. A Comparison of Stratification Models Based on Life Chances and Income¹²

For a complex analysis of the life-chance stratification model in Russia and to understand the basic principles and mechanisms of stratification present in modern Russian society, it is important to compare this model to one based on income level. The components and indicators used in the construction of the life-chance model are in part directly related to income (especially those components that have to do with economic conditions and consumer behavior, though the component of income as such is not used), and to other life opportunities, reflecting the framework of non-monetary inequalities in modern Russian society.

The choice of the income stratification model was based on the analysis of results that showed the efficiency of a relative approach involving median income for Russia. Based on recent findings, we identify five income groups (see Anikin et al., 2016); the income stratification model and the relevant group size are shown in Table 2¹³.

Table 2 – Income Stratification in Russia, RLMS-HSE, 2015, %

Boundaries with Respect to National Median Income	Income Groups	Group Size
Less or equal to 0.5	Poor	10.9
0.5 – 0.75	Vulnerable to poverty	19.1
0.75 – 1.25	Median group	36.7
1.25 – 2	Average-income	22.6
Over 2	High-income	10.7

The presence of risks and chances in Russian society, according to the RLMS-HSE data, is comparable: median values on positive and negative privilege scales were 2 each. A situation like this demonstrates how risks and chances typically counterbalance each other, although they can refer to different areas of life. In different income groups, however, the balance of risks and chances looks different (Table 3).

¹² In Sections 3 and 4, data from Wave 24 of the RLMS (2015) are used as the main empirical basis.

¹³ The median value of monthly average per capita income in Russian households was 15,000 rubles, according to the RLMS-HSE.

Table 3 – Mean and Median Values on Positive and Negative Privilege Scales in Different Income Groups, RLMS-HSE, 2015

Income Groups	Mean Values		Median Values	
	PP	NP	PP	NP
Poor	1.2	3.1	1	3
Vulnerable to poverty	1.8	2.6	2	2
Median group	1.9	2.4	2	2
Average-income	2.6	2.2	2	2
High-income	3.3	1.9	3	2
<i>Overall population</i>	2.1	2.4	2	2

Note: PP = positive privilege; NP = negative privilege.

As expected, positive privileges increase with income, while negative privileges decrease, which reflects the dependence of non-monetary aspects of living standards on monetary ones. However, the distribution of positive and negative privileges among income groups indicates several important characteristics of social stratification in modern Russia.

Negative privileges are prevalent in the three lower income groups (the poor, the vulnerable and the median group), particularly among the poor (while values on the positive privilege scale remain low, with less than 1.5 components present out of 12). But even among the poor, average values on the negative privilege scale are just slightly over 3 points out of 12 possible; relatively non-substantial negative privileges, on the whole, reflect the level of poverty in Russia not being very deep. Even in low-income cases, risks are not concentrated in all areas of life, but there is a certain deviation from the typical social standard. The poor are characterized by a limited range of life chances, but not their complete absence, although risks and hardships prevail in their everyday life. The predominance of negative privileges is also typical for the vulnerable and the median groups. These two groups are similar in terms of the balance of risks and chances, and this is telling of the median group which, by definition, characterizes the typical life situation of an average Russian (this group includes income levels that differ from national median values by no more than 25% in either direction).

Starting from the average-income group, positive privileges become prevalent over negative ones, although they remain limited and close to the national norm. For high-income groups, the prevalence of opportunities over risks is the most pronounced, however the extent of available life chances is not large.

Such a distribution of risks and chances in the income groups once again emphasizes the previous conclusion that the border dividing the well-off from the disadvantaged lies between the median and average-income groups, and the ratio of these groups is approximately one third to two thirds.

For the general life-chance stratification model which takes into account the ratio of positive and negative privileges, its configurations in the different income groups are shown in Figure 4. While

theoretically the scale ranges from -12 to +12 points, all values turned out to be within the range of -10 to +10 points.

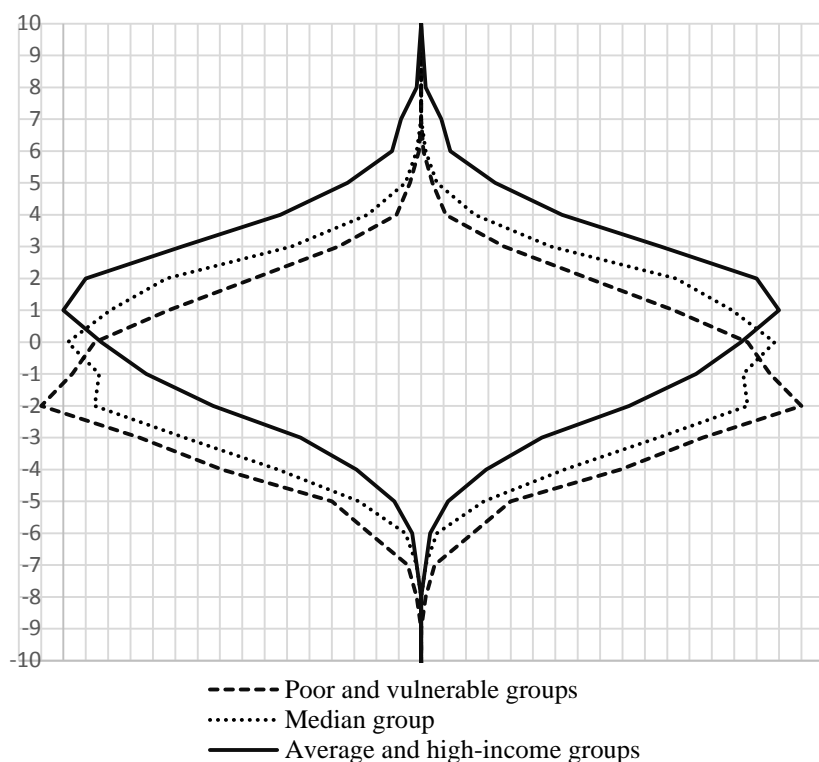


Figure 4 – General Model of Stratification based on Life Chances within Different Income Groups, RLMS-HSE, 2015.

Stratification models based on life chances and built for income groups move upwards relative to each other. Their configuration is similar, showing that the bulk of members in each group is concentrated in the middle, which indicates the relative homogeneity of groups in terms of chances and risks.

However, the model for the average- and high-income groups is characterized by a wider top, which reflects the concentration of life chances amid low risks among a part (although relatively small) of this group: almost one third of high-income Russians and 18.8% of average-income Russians have 3 or more points on the life chances scale, whereas this proportion is less than 10% for the median group and the vulnerable and just 2.3% for the poor (Table 4). On the contrary, a higher concentration of risks amid lower life chances (-3 points or less) is seen only among 5.1% of the high-income group and 12.5% of the average-income group, while for the median and vulnerable groups and for the poor these numbers are more than 20% and almost 40%, respectively.

However, with all the income group differences, it is also clear from the results that the population as a whole has a rather limited set of life chances, and the majority of members in each group, even in the opposite ones, fit into the societal norm (58.9% of the poor, about 70% of the vulnerable, median, and average-income groups, and 63.1% of the high-income group have from -2 to +2 points), demonstrating neither increased life chances, nor a concentration of risks.

Table 4 – Points on Integral Life Chances Scale in Different Income Groups, RLMS-HSE, 2015, %

Points on Integral Life Chances Scale	Poor	Vulnerable to poverty	Median group	Average-income	High-income
-3 or less	39.0	22.6	20.7	12.5	5,1
-2	18.6	16.1	14.6	10.7	6.4
-1	15.9	15.4	14.4	13.0	10.9
0	11.7	16.2	15.8	14.8	13.2
1	7.2	13.7	13.9	15.5	17.0
2	5.3	8.8	11.4	14.7	15.6
3 or more	2.3	7.2	9.2	18.8	31.8

The prevalence of negative privileges over positive ones can be seen in the average- and high-income groups as well, which means that relatively high income does not guarantee the complete elimination of risk. However, the percentage of people who are in such a situation is lower than in other groups: 22.4% in the high-income group and 36.2% in the average-income group, as opposed to 49.7% for the median group, 54.1% for the vulnerable, and 73.5%, for the poor. At the same time, the trend for those with the prevalence of positive privileges is the opposite: they account for 64.4% and 49.0% in two upper groups and for less than a half in other groups (34.5%, 29.7%, and 14.8% respectively).

These results demonstrate a relation between income stratification and life-chance stratification, although current income level does not entirely define the space of negative and positive privileges for an individual. According to the data, all income groups have subgroups with predominantly positive or negative privileges, albeit with different proportions. The Pearson correlation coefficient for income and points on the integral life-chance scale is significant at 0.01, but it indicates a moderate positive association (0.358). The association with income is stronger for positive privileges (0.345), than for negative ones (-0.239), which means that the income level increases life chances rather than eliminates social risks.

The biggest differences between the average indicators of income groups according to the four subscales used in the index calculation are seen in consumption and leisure activities, where the two upper income groups have higher chances and lower risks; the two lower groups have higher risks and no chances, while the median group occupies a middle position. In other areas, differences are smaller, although the poor are characterized by higher risks in terms of economic conditions, compared to other groups, and high-income Russians have more opportunities for investing in education and health, with no risks present. Thus, higher income is easily transformed into chances for consumption; however, to increase life chances in other areas of life and to eliminate respective risks, income alone (or, essentially, economic assets) is not enough. For that purpose, certain combinations of assets and certain external

conditions may be needed or a lack of external limitations (for instance, infrastructure), which is partially related to the settlement type and will be discussed further.

4. Residential Differentiation on Stratification Model by Life Chances

With considerable residential heterogeneity in Russia, it is not surprising that opportunities in important areas of life significantly differ across locations. In general, differences are expected: the bigger a settlement is, the better life chances are, so positive privileges become more pronounced, while negative privileges less so. For this reason, big cities traditionally become centers for migration flows in Russia, and the most common pattern of domestic migration is from smaller populated areas to larger ones. For urban populations, median values on both the positive and the negative privilege scales is 2 points out of 12, while for rural population the result was 2 and 4 points respectively.

Notably, differentiation among various populated areas in terms of positive privileges can be described by the degree of “distance from zero”: in more populated areas, the percentage of those with positive privileges in the range of 0-2 points decreases and the proportion of those with at least 3 points increases. As for negative privileges, the demarcation line is between urban and rural areas. For cities of various sizes, negatives privileges within the range of 2 points are typical, whereas for rural areas this indicator exceeds 2 points (Table 5).

Table 5 – Positive and Negative Privileges in Russia by Locality, RLMS-HSE, 2015, %

Locality / Points (scores)	0 scores	1-2 scores	3-4 scores	5-6 scores	7 or more scores
<i>Positive Privileges</i>					
Moscow and St. Petersburg	11.5	41.0	31.8	12.9	2.8
Regional centers	17.1	49.8	24.3	7.2	1.6
Mid-sized and small cities	19.1	48.8	24.5	6.7	0.8
Rural areas	23.7	56.4	16.8	2.8	0.3
<i>Overall population</i>	19.1	50.7	22.8	6.3	1.1
<i>Negative Privileges</i>					
Moscow and St. Petersburg	6.0	49.1	38.8	5.9	0.2
Regional centers	7.6	45.5	38.3	8.0	0.6
Mid-sized and small cities	8.1	43.6	38.9	8.7	0.7
Rural areas	4.6	36.4	46.6	11.5	0.9
<i>Overall population</i>	6.5	42.4	41.2	9.1	0.7

For 75% of Russians, positive privileges are combined with negative ones. The presence of only negative or positive privileges is characteristic of only a quarter of population (6.2% and 18.8% respectively), the other 0.3% of Russians find themselves in the situation of neutral life chances, or no privileges of any type. In rural areas, the percentage of those with only positive privileges is minimal (4.4% vs. 5.9–7.6% in other populated areas), while the percentage of those with only negative privileges is the highest (23.4% vs. 11.4–18.6% in other areas). In addition, quantitative life-chance indicators with opposite values result in the overall privileges for two thirds of the rural population (68.5%) and for half of regional center populations (52.0–52.8%) staying negative, while for Moscow and St. Petersburg typical values are above zero (60.7%) (Table 6).

Table 6 – Integral Life-Chances Indicators in Russia by Locality, RLMS-HSE, 2015, %

Locality / Points on Integral Life-Chances Scale	–3 or less	–2	–1	0	1	2	3 or more
Moscow and St. Petersburg	15.7	11.8	11.8	15.9	14.5	13.0	17.3
Regional centers	21.3	15.4	15.4	12.7	12.4	10.5	12.4
Mid-sized and small cities	23.2	15.4	14.2	14.3	11.9	8.7	12.3
Rural areas	33.0	19.4	16.1	11.1	8.6	6.0	5.8
<i>Overall population</i>	<i>25.0</i>	<i>16.3</i>	<i>14.9</i>	<i>13.0</i>	<i>11.3</i>	<i>8.8</i>	<i>10.7</i>

Positive privileges in Russia develop mainly because of the relatively sufficient opportunities in consumption and leisure, and human capital accumulation and retention (Table 7). In these areas, positive privileges are a typical (according to the median) characteristic of the Russian population. However, negative privileges are located in the same areas, too. And, notably, positive privileges in consumption and negative privileges in human capital accumulation are characteristic of all Russians, irrespective of their place of residence. As an individual's life chances are determined both by living conditions and behavior strategies, this situation indicates that Russians are primarily focused on consumption, while opportunities related to investing in various areas of life and further capitalizing on those investments are ignored. Such a shift in focus to consumer practices demonstrates limited opportunities for participating in the technological opportunities of the country's development, since human capital accumulation is crucial for those life choices. This is emphasized by the fact that a typical work situation in Russia does not entail such opportunities either.

Assessing the residential distribution of privileges in different areas of life, Russians residing Moscow and St. Petersburg are to a certain extent deprived economically (in terms of economic conditions), apparently because they bore the brunt of the crisis in 2014-2016.

The majority of the rural population is characterized by negative privileges in consumption, unlike other types of settlements. In rural regions, consumption and leisure activities are determined by the economic possibilities of the population, and by the availability and state of infrastructure. The rural

population has no positive privileges in human capital accumulation either, which in the long run can result in an even bigger gap in life chances for the opposite ends of the settlement area range. It is rural areas that are becoming, and will eventually remain, the zone of the least life chances.

Table 7 – Life Chances of Russians in Key Areas of Life, by Locality, RLMS-HSE, 2015, % and median values

Locality / Privileges	Positive Privileges					Negative Privileges				
	3	2	1	0	Median	0	1	2	3	Median
	Economic Conditions									
Moscow and St. Petersburg	1.6	7.9	30.4	60.1	0	41.2	50.6	7.7	0.5	1
Regional centers	0.3	4.5	23.6	41.7	0	51.7	41.9	5.9	0.5	0
Mid-sized and small cities	0.0	1.9	19.9	78.1	0	56.6	38.3	4.7	0.4	0
Rural areas	0.0	0.8	11.5	87.7	0	55.2	38.9	5.6	0.3	0
<i>Overall population</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>19.5</i>	<i>77.2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>52.9</i>	<i>41.0</i>	<i>5.7</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0</i>
	Work Situation									
Moscow and St. Petersburg	0.2	2.9	12.3	84.6	0	85.0	13.2	1.6	0.1	0
Regional centers	0.2	2.6	10.9	86.3	0	80.6	15.4	3.7	0.3	0
Mid-sized and small cities	0.1	2.8	14.0	83.1	0	80.3	16.0	3.6	0.1	0
Rural areas	0.1	1.4	10.2	88.3	0	82.9	14.9	2.2	0.0	0
<i>Overall population</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>11.6</i>	<i>86.0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>81.8</i>	<i>15.1</i>	<i>2.9</i>	<i>0.1</i>	<i>0</i>
	Human Capital Accumulation									
Moscow and St. Petersburg	4.9	25.9	34.9	34.3	1	44.6	41.0	12.8	1.5	1
Regional centers	3.7	22.2	32.4	41.7	1	33.7	42.6	21.0	2.7	1
Mid-sized and small cities	4.0	20.9	32.6	42.5	1	29.7	41.8	25.1	3.5	1
Rural areas	1.5	13.3	28.6	56.5	0	22.5	45.8	29.0	2.7	1
<i>Overall population</i>	<i>3.2</i>	<i>19.3</i>	<i>31.5</i>	<i>46.0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>30.3</i>	<i>43.3</i>	<i>23.7</i>	<i>2.7</i>	<i>1</i>
	Consumption and Leisure Activities									
Moscow and St. Petersburg	3.0	16.0	46.7	34.3	1	53.0	41.2	5.7	0.1	0
Regional centers	1.5	10.4	41.3	46.8	1	55.0	36.6	7.5	0.9	0
Mid-sized and small cities	1.1	9.7	40.9	48.2	1	52.9	36.2	8.9	2.0	0
Rural areas	1.0	6.6	45.6	46.8	1	39.1	40.8	17.4	2.7	1
<i>Overall population</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>9.6</i>	<i>43.3</i>	<i>45.7</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>48.9</i>	<i>38.5</i>	<i>10.9</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>1</i>

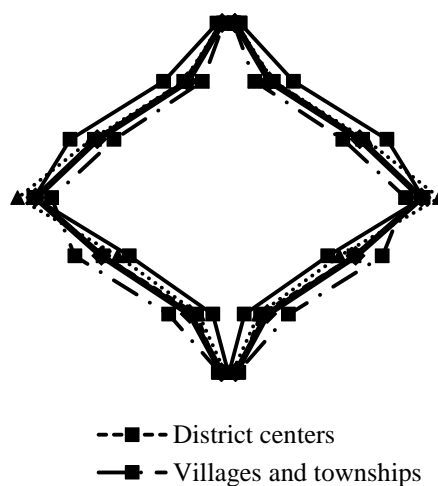
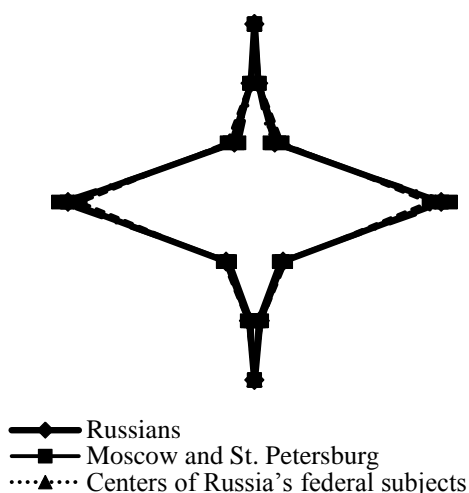
Thus, the general model of life chances in Russia with respect to positive and negative privileges also varies by the type of location, considering the territory's high heterogeneity. Unsurprisingly, the reduction of socioeconomic and sociocultural activity in small towns and settlements leads to a scarcity of

opportunities, as the environments there are characterized by undeveloped labor markets, limited leisure opportunities, and poor social and economic infrastructure.

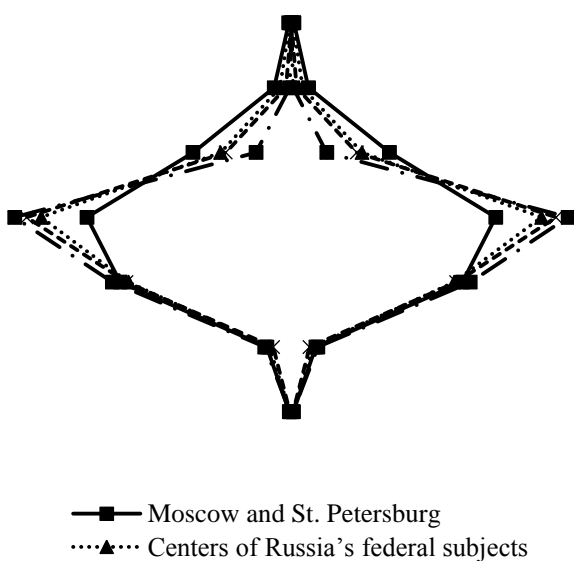
The following conclusions can be made about the integral indicators describing opportunities and risks in key areas of life. The work situation for Russians, regardless of the settlement type, is marked by a lack of any privileges (in Figure 5A, this is demonstrated by the wide middle part of the pattern describing the respective component distributions). Life-chance distribution in this area does not change with the type of settlement. Even with notable differences in workforce supply and demand, employment type, etc. depending on the populated area type and size, aspects related to basic guarantees and additional employee benefits and job content, are similar for Russians in various locations.

B. Consumption and Leisure Activities

A. Work Situation



C. Economic Conditions



D. Human Capital Accumulation

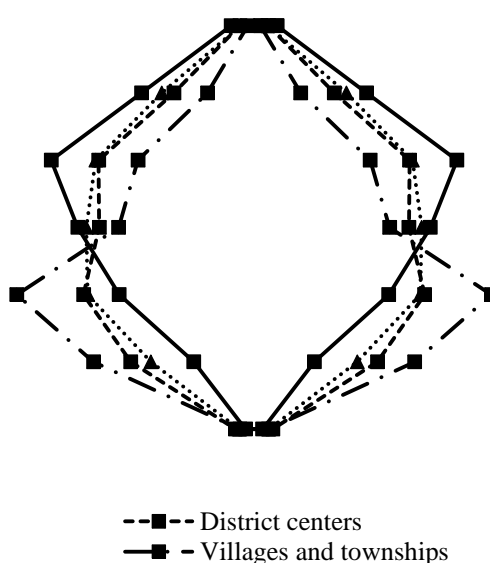


Figure 5 – Life Chances (Integral Indicators) of Russians in Key Areas of Life, by Locality, RLMS-HSE, 2015, %

Moderate differences are also notable in consumption and leisure activities (Figure 5B): with the evened-out diamond-shaped pattern of distribution for all types of settlement, the gap between rural areas and capitals is practically invisible.

Economic conditions, irrespective of the settlement type, demonstrate a concentration in the zone of neutral, nominally zeroed-out life chances and the zone adjacent to it. The top and bottom “spires”, referring to the distribution of opportunities (Figure 5C), indicate that capitals are ahead by a certain margin, although they are affected by negative privileges the most. In capitals, access to a wider range of economic opportunities compensates for contemporary difficulties caused by the recent economic crisis of 2014-2016.

Residential differentiation is the most distinctive for human capital accumulation and retention (Figure 5D); Moscow and St. Petersburg provide the channels and room for the positive privilegization of life chances; other urban areas represent the average distribution of life chances, and rural areas depreciate people’s opportunities so that residing in the countryside creates serious risks. Compared to opportunities in education and health, the residential differentiation of life chances in economic domains (economic conditions, consumption, leisure activities, and work situation) are less salient. In other words, a considerable residential difference in opportunities related to human capital accumulation not only reassesses the current situation with life chances inequality, but also conserves this situation in the long run.

Conclusion

There is thus a strong argument for considering life chances in terms of their stratification role rather than the causal result of social structure. The analytical implication of this theory may vary; in the present paper, we apply an index-based measurement which provides us with an integral estimation of life chances in Russia. Although we are still far from determining the ‘real groups’, the measurement of life chances by index solves the initial task of the social differentiation of people regarding their position in the inequality of opportunities and risks. Considering social structure in terms of opportunities and risks is in line Weber’s original idea of positively and negatively privileged distributions of life chances. This allows a description of the average in key areas of life (such as economic security, investment in education and health, industrial relations, consumption and leisure activities) and the extent to which people deviate from it. The indicators of positive and negative privileges, and the integral model comprising both scales lead us to reassess the conclusions about standards of living in contemporary Russia.

Our empirical results show that life opportunities among the vast majority of Russians are close to the average, positive privileges are found only in some areas of life, and the percentage of those who have access to multiple positive privileges is very small. This averaging process partly corresponds to income distribution. Russians from high-income groups have better life chances and can eliminate certain risks

with their earnings, while the poor are faced with the predominance of socio-economic risks. Nevertheless, most people in all income groups, even the opposite ones, fit within the societal norm, showing that the life-chance approach to social stratification goes beyond income stratification. For instance, a relatively high income boosts positively privileged opportunities rather than eliminate the negative impact of social risks. In other words, high incomes do not secure people from negative privilegization, when economic security and work situation are concerned; instead, Russians are more likely to spend their high incomes on consumption and leisure. This shows that the recent income growth in Russia failed to secure the fundamental economic interests of people caused by the subsequent state escapism from industrial relations. The growing façade of consumption has masked the fundamental despair of labor. Above all, the residential disparities of life chances reveal the considerable advantages of larger cities over smaller ones in terms of life chances and risks, and this is most pronounced when it comes to investments in education and health.

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